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Earthquake leaves path of destruction

"Give him an 8, give him an 8," shrieked Jimmy Hart on syndicated television recently.

Hart wasn't referring to a gymnastics or diving score. He was referring to an earthquake on the Richter scale — the wrestling Richter scale that is.

The Earthquake, a 6-foot-6½, 450-pounder with maneuvers called tremors, aftershocks and the Earthquake Splash — where he jumps in the air then sits on an opponent's chest — is the World Wrestling Federation's hottest villain.

During the Brother Love segment on May 26, The Earthquake snuck up on Hulk Hogan, delivered three Earthquake Splashes while Hart gave the Richter scale readings, and left Hogan lying on the ground.

Hogan will be out of action most of the summer. The explanation will be the televised incident. He is scheduled to be back on TV in late July, vowing to gain revenge at the WWF's next pay-per-view show Aug. 27.

The scenario is almost a carbon copy of what the rival National Wrestling Alliance did last summer: Terry Funk put the NWA champ, Ric Flair, on the sidelines for a few months to build a revenge match on pay-per-view.

As a WWF villain, The Earthquake is a modernized version of Gorilla Monsoon of the early 1960s. Monsoon is better known today as Bobby Heenan's television foil. But in the early '60s, Monsoon was The Manchurian Giant, a 400-pounder who spoke no English and who had grappling wars with Bruno Sammartino.

But Monsoon was really an amateur wrestler, Robert Marella, from Ithaca College in upstate New York. The Earthquake, whose real name is John Tenta, has a similar background.

Tenta, 27, a native of Surrey, British Columbia, was the 1981 junior (teenage) world super-heavyweight champion in freestyle wrestling. He earned a wrestling scholarship to Louisiana State, but after his freshman year LSU dropped its wrestling program. (During Tenta's freshman season, he lost once to current pro standout Steve "Dr. Death" Williams, then a senior at Oklahoma.)

Tenta then was recruited by sumo wrestling officials from Japan, which



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was his next stop. He became sumo wrestler Kototenzan in 1983. Kototenzan gained notoriety because of his size, and because he was the only native North American in the sumo world.

Tenta grew tired of the Sumo lifestyle, and in 1986 he turned to pro wrestling. The story made news headlines in Japan and was covered by The New York Times.

Because of his sumo name, size, and credentials as an amateur, Japanese promoters felt Tenta had box-office power. He signed a \$100,000 per year deal, a significant figure in Japan for an untested rookie.

But the superstardom in Japan never came. Tenta's promoter, Giant Baba, wanted him to drop to 385 pounds (from 440) before he would let him wrestle. Baba felt he needed the agility and conditioning to make it in the more athletic Japanese style.

Tenta shed some weight and showed early potential. It wasn't long before Tenta was famous for his high dropkick, a maneuver that required incredible agility for one so large.

But things didn't pan out in Japan. When his weight returned to sumo-size, Tenta was stuck in preliminary matches. Baba felt he wasn't making progress because of the added weight. Tenta was far too big and powerful to lose to any but the biggest names and make it look convincing.

Tenta was able to get a tryout in the WWF about a year ago. He went through several name changes quickly. First as John Tenta, a good guy, who had a few tryout matches. Then it was villain Earthquake Evans. Finally, the WWF introduced him as a fan out of the stands who squashed The Ultimate Warrior by jumping on him during a push-up demonstration between Warrior and Dino Bravo. He was brought in as The Canadian Earthquake, but now is The Earthquake.

ETC: The Road Warriors, whose last televised appearance in the National Wrestling Alliance was aired Saturday, will be joining the WWF on July 16 in Omaha. Even though the Warriors are the most famous tag team in the world, they will be forced to change their name because the WWF has a wrestler named The Ultimate Warrior. However, as the Legion of Doom, promoter Vince McMahon allowed them to keep their trademark face paint. Also expect three more major changes in the duo: Paul Ellering will no longer manage the team; the new-wave haircuts will be replaced by a more conventional style; and they will be villains instead of good guys. The LOD will be groomed to feud with Demolition, a tag team McMahon created to capitalize on the success the Warriors had in the NWA.

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